

The Famous Tanner Family and Tanner's Crossing, now Minnedosa, Manitoba

John Tanner Jr. (1839-1932)

Tanner's Crossing is situated on the Carlton Trail between Fort Garry and Fort Edmonton. Travelers enter the Little Saskatchewan Valley through a narrow eastern pass where they descend one hundred and seventy-five feet to the valley floor. In 1869, John Tanner Jr. built a ferry across the Little Saskatchewan River on the Carlton Trail. He also operated a store and post office at this location. The Tanners were one of four original Metis families to settle in this area. The heads of the four families were John Norquay, George Sanderson, Peter Sinclair and John Tanner. The area was a centuries old trapping and hunting area for the bison that wintered at Riding Mountain and moved down the valley to the plains in the summer. In 1877, Tanner and J.S. Armitage accumulated land and laid out a townsite in the river valley. Armitage changed the name to Minnedosa in 1883.

Served in the Civil War

John Tanner, the son of Reverend James Tanner, was a veteran of the American Civil War. John was born on August 17, 1839 at Torch Lake (Lac du Flambeau), Wisconsin. His grandfather was the famous John Falcon Tanner—known as the White Indian. John Jr. had just started farming in Tears County near his home at St. Joseph when the Civil War started. In August of 1862 he went to St. Cloud to enlist as a private in the Union Army's Ninth Regiment of the Minnesota Voluntary Infantry. He fought for three years before taking an honorary discharge at Fort Snelling near St. Paul, Minnesota.

Moves back to Canada

While he originally lived in Minnesota, following the war he found that his family had moved across the border and were living near Portage la Prairie. At the time his father's half brother, Picheito Tanner was an important chief of the Red Lake tribe located in the Portage-Delta-White Horse Plains area. Thus John came to Manitoba around the time of his father's death, and with his wife Catherine, and his mother, PooPie, took up residence along the Little Saskatchewan River, near the Fort Ellice Trail. Here he established a ferry, post office, and store at Tanners Crossing. This was the beginning of what was to become the Manitoba town of Minnedosa. During the early 1880s, white agriculturists from Ontario were populating the area around Tanner's Crossing. Like other mixed-bloods who were not comfortable with this, the Tanner family left Manitoba in 1881 to settle further west at Prince Albert. They lived there until 1912. When this area became more densely populated with agriculturists from the East, John Tanner again moved, this time back to Manitoba, to the Metis community of Kinostota. He lived there until his death in 1932, leaving no direct descendants.

While scouting near Fort Abercrombie in 1863, John had sustained a serious rupture and as a result of complications he could not father children. In 1869, he married Catherine Trottier, daughter of Joseph Trottier of St. Mary's and the widow of HBC Factor John Sinclair.

Reverend Edwin James Tanner. (1805-1870)

Manitoba's first election was lively and violent. A campaign homicide, still unsolved, was that of Rev. James Tanner of the Portage la Prairie region. Sometimes considered the first Presbyterian minister west of Winnipeg, this Metis son of the famous "White Indian," John Falcon Tanner, was half-brother to one of Manitoba's greatest war Chiefs: Picheito Tanner. Picheito had battled the Sioux long into the Red River Settlement era. His elaborate log house stood in what is now the heart of Portage la Prairie. He and his sons played a major part in the fur trade freighting business to St. Paul.

James was born in the Fond du Lac area, the son of John Falcon Tanner and his second wife, a Saulteaux woman from the Sault Ste. Marie/Rainy River area who later took the name Theresa (she died in Makinak in 1850). From 1812-1828 John Tanner was employed by the Fond du Lac department of the American Fur Company and as an interpreter for US Indian agent, Col. George Boyd. During this time James received a fairly good education at the Rev. William Terry School. After the family moved to Sault Ste. Marie in 1828, James attended the Baptist Mission school of Rev. Abel Bingham.

At age 23, Roman Catholic Bishop Baraga baptized James at La Pointe, Wisconsin and James then married Louise Instkwekamegoka. She was the well-known "Granny" Tanner who spent her later years from 1870 to 1886 at Tanners Crossing, Manitoba (after James was killed).

After a reckless life as a Half-Breed freighter working for the well-known trader, Norman Kittson, at Pembina, James Tanner became a Presbyterian missionary among the Saulteaux people on the plains around Pembina, Fort Gary and Portage la Prairie.

For at least a decade, James Tanner worked for Norman Kittson's famous line connecting St. Paul with Fort Garry. He also helped Kittson cut the Woods Trail from St. Paul to Pembina. During his many trips to Manitoba he came to know well his famous half-brother, Chief Picheito Tanner of Portage la Prairie (also a trader and freighter). During this time James is described as "a notorious character, a giant in strength, who would terrorize entire villages when under the influence of rum."

However, in 1846, the tragic year of his father's death, James and his wife were converted to Methodism and became missionaries. For two years they laboured at Lake Winnibigoshish near Bimidji. During July 1850, James went on a 1,000-mile mission trip across the West on horseback from the Red Lake region of Minnesota, west before

circling back to the Winnipeg-Portage la Prairie region of Manitoba. One Pembina resident commented on this amazing conversion “he is a changed man, I think the bible is the only book he reads....” After preaching briefly to a 700 cart buffalo hunting Metis brigade, he joined a 500-cart brigade for over one week. Subsequently, on various occasions, James would preach to Rev. John Black’s Old Kildonan congregation and to the congregation at Rev. Cochran’s St. Peter’s Mission. James is reported to have assisted Rev. Edwin James in translating the Bible into the Saulteaux language.

With Rev. John Black’s help, James worked diligently through 1852 to establish a Presbyterian mission to his brother’s band but Hudson’s Bay Company Governor Eden Colville turned a deaf ear (likely because there was already a Roman Catholic mission at St. François Xavier). Failing this, Tanner got the support of the American Baptist Society to build a mission in the Metis community of St. Joseph, North Dakota. However, after the wife of his Presbyterian mission colleague and his mission’s school teaching assistant were killed in separate Sioux Indian raids, his superiors closed down the mission. Subsequently, Rev. Tanner went on a lecture tour to Boston and several other American cities. He then traveled to England where his family had an audience with Queen Victoria. Upon his return to Canada he took up freighting again for a short period.

During the 1869-70 resistance James Tanner played a moderating role since he tended to side with the English Metis, he was instrumental in keeping his fiery brother, Picheito, out of the conflict. He did however become involved in the subsequent first provincial election campaign. He wrote to James Ross in Winnipeg trying to persuade him to run against the Canadian Party (led by Dr. Lynch) in the Marquette riding. James Ross, along with his brother-in-law Rev. George Flett, were moderate Metis who had served in Riel’s Provisional Government.

Rev. Tanner killed during election campaign

Two weeks after writing to Ross, following an election meeting at Portage la Prairie, where Rev. Tanner had spoken on behalf of Lieutenant Governor Archibald, he was killed in a fall from a wagon when two men stampeded the team. When Rev. John Black of Kildonan drove his team furiously from Winnipeg to claim his friend’s body for Christian burial, he found that Tanner’s brother, Chief Picheito Tanner, was already there. Face hard and scornful, he told Black: “Alive my brother preached your Gospel. You (Whites) killed him. I take him to my people who do not kill their Medicine Men.” Thus ended Picheito’s 15 year period of Christianity and to this day James Tanner’s final resting-place is unknown.

Black, a close friend of Tanner’s although living over 50 miles away, claimed that the team was deliberately stampeded by Colonel Wolseley’s soldiers who were whooping and firing shots into the air. At the inquest, David McKenzie testified he had been a passenger in the wagon and that driver John Tait and James Tanner were thrown from it during the runaway. He and Joseph Pritchin who was riding behind, both testified that the stampede was deliberately caused by two men on foot, who were hiding at the corner between the Taylor and Gunn farms. The two had suddenly appeared and spooked the

team by hurling objects at the horses. The jury concluded that death was due to the fall caused by the runaway caused “willfully and maliciously by two persons unknown to this jury.”

Thomas DeCorby Tanner. (b. 1820)

Thomas Tanner was the son of Chief Picheito Tanner and the younger brother of Chief Gambler Tanner. He was probably born in the Red Lake area of Minnesota since the Red Lake Band moved freely back and forth across the international border. In 1836, he married Marie Angelique Ledoux at Turtle Mountain near what is now Belcourt, North Dakota. Marie’s mother was Wehwashk. Their children were: Jean Baptiste who married Victoire Boyer (born 1852 at Grand Coteau) in 1875 at Winnipeg; Angelique, who was born 1850 at Carlton. She married Joseph Descheneaux in 1869 at St. Albert ; and Marie, born 1854. She married Jean Belhumeur dit Monet on May 27, 1874 at Duck Lake.

Joseph Tanner, “Ke-she-sha-way.” (b. 1822)

Joseph Tanner was another son of Chief Picheito Tanner and younger brother of Chief Gambler Tanner. He was probably born in the Red Lake area of Minnesota since the Red Lake Band moved freely back and forth across the international border. Joseph was the grandson of John “Falcon” Tanner and his Saulteaux wife, Red Sky of the Morning. *Kasheshaway (Kissoway)* was a trader and freighter on the St. Paul-Pembina-Winnipeg route, he was known to have as many as 200 Red River carts on the road at one time. Joseph first married Angélique Clermont and they had a daughter, Marie born in 1842 at Fort Ellice. Marie married Jean Nolin of St. Vital.

Joseph Tanner then married Chief Yellow Quill's sister and was a member of Yellow Quill's band. They had one daughter, Julie, born in 1849 at Portage la Prairie. She married John Wells of St. Francois Xavier. Joseph died in 1897 at the Crooked Lake Reserve in what is now Saskatchewan.

Chief Picheito Tanner. (d. 1872)

Picheito Tanner was the eldest son of John “Falcon” Tanner (The White Indian) and his Saulteaux wife, Red Sky of the Morning. There were two daughters as well, but nothing is known of them. The historical record indicates that Chief Picheito Tanner moved west into the Assiniboine River valley, from Portage La Prairie very soon after his half-brother Rev. James Tanner was killed in 1870. Picheito was known at various times as Little Pheasant, Pheasant Tail or Rump, Le Croup de Pheasant and *Nahawananan*. His

oldest son was Gambler Tanner,¹ also known as, *Atakawinin* or *Otahaoman* or possibly James. Hugh McKay, former Chief at Waywayseecappo, says that the correct spelling of Gambler's Indian name is *Odit-ta-gay-win-nin*.

Signatory to Treaty 1

Picheito was a leader of his mother's people, the Red Lake Saulteaux, who lived in the White Horse Plains, Portage la Prairie Delta area. Picheito lived in the largest house in Portage la Prairie, near the main road leading into the settlement (presently the corner of Crescent Ave. and Broadway). He had many souvenirs in his home, such as glass candlesticks and mechanical toys, which he brought back from his many trips to the United States. He was known as a man with a taste for elegance and comfort. He is thought to have been the Chief, *Nahawananan*, who signed Treaty No. 1 on August 3rd 1871. Sometime after this, he took his band to the Fort Qu'Appelle region and died there around 1872. His chieftanship thereby passed to his son Gambler Tanner.

During the 1870s, Picheito's other sons attached themselves to a group of their Metis relatives who were making a last attempt at the buffalo robe trade. They followed the buffalo robe trade west to the vicinity of Buffalo Lake Alberta, then south into Montana. They were eventually forced out of Montana by US troops (except for the Plains-Ojibway who remained on Rocky Boy's reserve). A number of these hunters then congregated at the Cypress Hills near Fort Walsh. A number of Tanners appear on the Treaty Annuity Paylists at Maple Creek Saskatchewan. The Tanners are reported to have moved from there to Silver Creek to join their brother Gambler in the early 1880s. Three other families also moved to Gambler Reserve from Maple Creek about the same time: namely, Jandrew, Kakaneeshik and Maqua (Black Bear). Cowessess and the balance of the Plains-Ojibway were eventually persuaded to move from Cypress Hills to the Qu'Appelle Valley because the American government was pressuring Canadian authorities not to settle them along the US border.

John Tanner, "The Gambler." (1842-1916)

Gambler Tanner (*Odit-ta-gay-win-nin*, *Atakawinin* or *Otahaoman*). Gambler Tanner was the eldest son of Chief Picheito Tanner. He was probably born in the Red Lake area of Minnesota since the Red Lake Band moved freely back and forth across the international border. Gambler was the grandson of John "Falcon" Tanner (The White Indian) and his Saulteaux wife, Red Sky of the Morning. Like his cousin (also John Tanner), Gambler had served in the American Army during the Civil War. Following the war he became a trader in the Qu'Appelle Lakes region. He rarely traded at Fort Ellice, preferring to do business further north at Fort Pelly. In earlier years Gambler, along with his father Picheito, had been deeply involved in the freighting business between St. Paul, Minnesota and Winnipeg. Gambler was one of the Plains-Ojibway's most noted warriors against the Sioux at Portage la Prairie during the 1860s. during the 1870s he lead a band

¹ Archdeacon Cochran states that when he arrived in Portage la Prairie in the early 1850s both Picheito (Image) and Atakawinin (Gambler) were living there as permanent residents (Garrioch, 1923: 94).

of at least 30 families including his siblings, Joseph (*Kasesaway*, Bright Star), Thomas John (*Cheton*), Edward (*Ahjjukoonce*), Bazel, and Alexander. Little more is known of him until he appeared as spokesman for the Saulteaux at the Treaty Four negotiations.

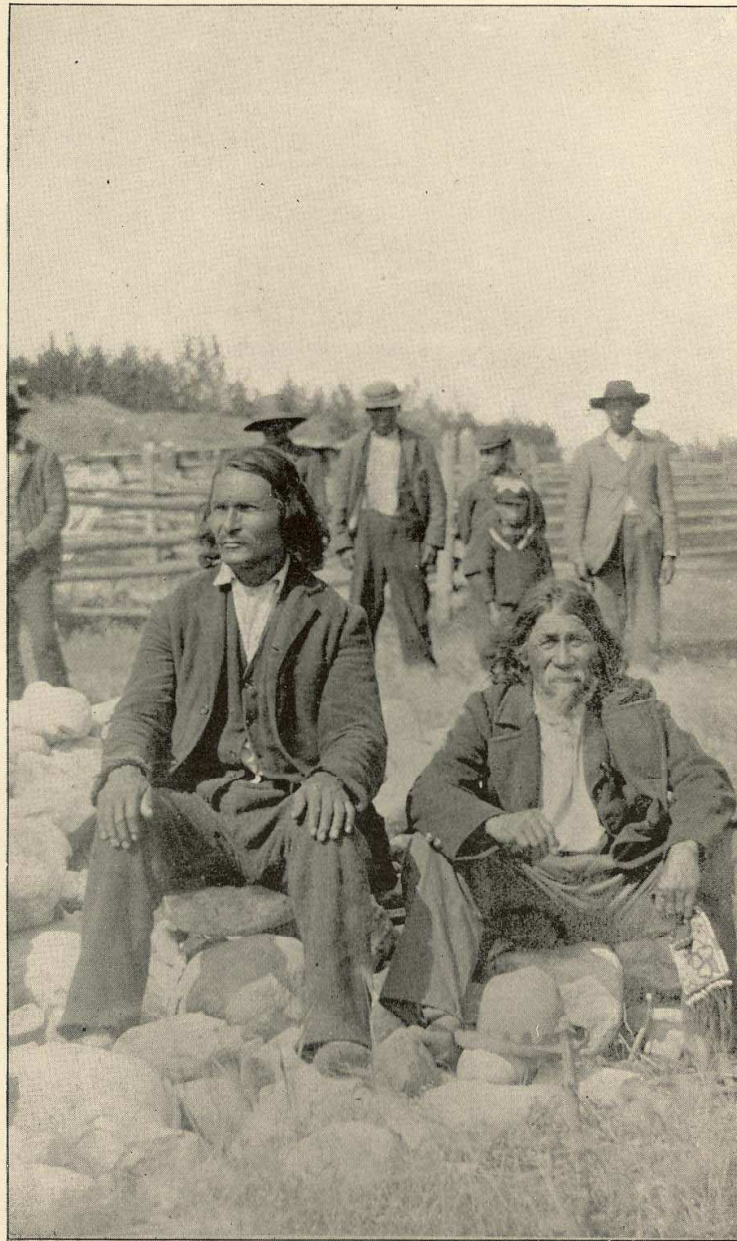
Negotiated Treaty 4

In the 1870s he was one of the most vigorous opponents of the Hudson's Bay Company land holdings and had a great influence in the making of Treaty Four. This antipathy for the HBC was likely inherited from his (step) great-grandmother Netnokwa (an Odawa) who was affiliated with the North West Company. He represented the Qu'Appelle Lakes Saulteaux in this negotiation.

Gambler was originally slated to live on the Waywayseecappo reserve at Lizard Point, however, in 1881, a dispute arose between Chief Waywayseecappo and his headman, Gambler. By way of settlement, a portion of the Lizard Point Reserve (30 square miles) was allocated for Gambler and his followers. They were given this appropriation at Silver Creek, situated approximately five and one half miles southwest of the present day Binscarth Manitoba.

Clerk of the Privy Council, J.D. Cote approved this allocation by Chief Waywayseecappo on April 27, 1881. This was recorded on July 27, 1881 and confirmation of Gambler's reserve became effective on May 17, 1889, eight years later. Two years previous to this confirmation, Longclaws, Gambler and their followers decided to return to Lizard Point, claiming that there was insufficient wood and water available at Silver Creek. In 1887, Gambler and his followers returned to Lizard Point, giving as a reason, the shortage of hay land at Silver Creek. There was also some indication the land survey at Silver Creek did not place the reserve exactly where Gambler had originally requested it. The resultant location excluded the wood and hay areas across the river. This was not a problem in the early 1880s, as there were few other people in the region and the group continued to make use of this land and its resources in spite of its location off-reserve. However, as settlement and immigration increased Gambler recognized that these practices could not continue. He made several efforts in 1885 and 1886 to make a land exchange for land with better hay and wood resources but was rebuffed or ignored by officials. An additional reason to move was that the Lizard Point Reserve was much closer to their traditional hunting and trapping areas. Between 1880 and 1890 some of Gambler's followers joined the Indians who lived at Valley River, leaving only members of the Tanner family living at Silver Creek. The census of 1901 shows that by that year, only 14 people remained at Gambler Reserve:

John Tanner (age 40), wife Marie (35), 5 sons and 2 daughters;
Ah-pa-tis' widow (age 69);
John Cook (Pa-pa-mas, age 21);
Mrs. Swan (age 40); and
Nazakeeass (Jim Tanner, age 24) and his wife.



LOUIS O'SOUP AND THE "GAMBLER," TWO WELL-KNOWN INDIANS OF THE NORTHWEST

By 1905, only John Tanner and his son Joseph Tanner and their families remained at Gambler. Note that of Gambler's brothers, Joseph Tanner (Kakashaway, Bright Star) died at Waywayseecappo in 1893. His widow then lived at various locations in the North West Territories. His daughters took Metis scrip one year after his death (1894). Bazil Tanner later transferred to the Cowessess Band. Alexander Tanner (Pawanaway-askung), Tommy Tanner (Kakeewaycomo) and John *Cheton* Tanner [d. 1937], and his wife May [d. 1922]) stayed at Silver Creek, but in 1894 they took Metis scrip and were discharged

from Treaty status. Other relatives such as Ambroise Fisher also took scrip as Metis, in 1900 Ambroise was granted 80 acres. Because of legal difficulties, Alexander later fled to North Dakota. Gambler had two other brothers, Joseph (*Kasesaway* or Bright Star) and Edward (or *Ahjjukoonce*).

Kasesaway (Kissoway) was a trader and freighter on the St. Paul-Pembina-Winnipeg route, he was known to have as many as 200 Red River carts on the road at one time. He married Chief Yellow Quill's sister and was a member of Yellow Quill's band. He died in 1897 at the Crooked Lake Reserve. *Ahjjukoonce* (Edward) never lived on Gambler's reserve. He likely lived at White Earth reserve in Minnesota, having moved there in the 1870s.

From 1874 until 1893 Gambler was Chief at Silver Creek. With his wife *Kaytepaytonook* and his family, he lived in a converted granary which, according to the Indian agent, was, "partitioned, whitewashed, a good comfortable dwelling." He owned fine horses, cattle, geese and pigs. He had fifty acres broken and had a large stable and other buildings. For pets he had a moose calf and later a young adult moose. He and a neighbour purchased a mower and a rake together to further their farming activities. In his later years living on the Silver Creek Reserve, Gambler provided a home for his aunt Poopie, widow of the Reverend James Tanner. She left his care in 1910 to live with her son John and his wife at Kinosota, Manitoba.

Gambler moved to Waywayseecappo's Reserve in 1887 and then moved on to Pine Creek in 1897. Eventually, Gambler withdrew from the Birtle Agency on June 29, 1898. Edmund Morris records in his diary (August 30, 1908: 90) "The Gambler lives at Shoal Lake between Lizard Point and Minnedosa." According to the recollection of others he moved to Valley River and then to Pine Creek, near Camperville Manitoba, where he became a member of that band. He spent the last years of his life at Big Stone in the Riding Mountain. He died Jan. 22, 1916 at Elphinstone while living with his daughter at Keeseekowenin. He was buried on Indian land at Clear Lake (Manitoba Free Press, Jan. 29, 1916).



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This article is compiled from primary research and from notes, manuscript copies, interviews and correspondence with Dr. Peter Lorenz Neufeld.²

² Neufeld, Peter L. "Manitoba Indian Chiefs and Missionaries: Brothers and Cousins." Winnipeg: Unpublished, no date, author's copy.